

A Groundbreaking Board Drives Strategy

The fact is that to be truly effective at creating social change a nonprofit MUST have a strategy for the future and a plan for how they will get there. A groundbreaking board is strategic and focused on the big picture. A long-term view gets people excited and engaged. Understanding where the organization is going and how they fit into that direction will inspire board members to step up and take action.

A groundbreaking board is driven by a great strategic plan. There are some very clear ways that a great strategic plan differs from a poor one:

• A **great** strategic plan starts from an in-depth understanding of the outside community marketplace in which the nonprofit operates (trends in clients, funders, competitors, etc.). Whereas a **poor** strategic plan is created in a vacuum among only board and staff. A nonprofit board member once told me that at a strategic planning retreat years ago board members were asked to write their goals for the organization on post-it notes, which were then tacked around the room and voted on. And like that, their strategic plan was born.

• A **great** strategic plan forces the organization to articulate its value proposition, i.e. how the organization uniquely uses community inputs to create significant social value (change to a social problem). A **poor** strategic plan fails to articulate a value proposition and assumes that everyone outside the organization loves it and understands its value just as much as everyone inside the organization.

• A **great** strategic plan puts everything on the table and allows no sacred cows. Board members with pet interests are reigned in and staff members who are not contributing are encouraged to realign themselves with the new plan. A **poor** strategic plan only deals with the easy or non-controversial issues and leaves the difficult questions aside.

• A **great** strategic plan makes sure that the strategy for programs is aligned with the organization’s business and financial model so that the resulting strategic plan includes programs, financing and operations in an integrated way. A **poor** strategic plan focuses only on programs and assumes that the money will somehow follow.   
  
• A **great** strategic plan includes a tactical plan so that the broad goals are broken down into individual steps to get there. This allows the organization to monitor and revise the plan on an on-going basis. A **poor** strategic plan has no tactical plan or monitoring system attached to it. Once approved, staff or board never see it again and it certainly doesn’t drive the day-to-day activity of the organization.

• A **great** strategic plan is inspiring and compelling to potential funders. It sets forth a bold vision for the future and a specific road map for getting there, which inspires confidence and investment. A **poor** strategic plan is boring, maintains the status quo, and elicits only nominal external support.

It’s not enough to go through the “strategy” motions. A real strategic plan is bold, compelling, tactical, well-financed, integrated and inspiring. It gets a groundbreaking board moving forward in a common direction from which real change flows. Once you have a great strategic plan in place, the groundbreaking board can regularly monitor whether their nonprofit is delivering on it.

From:   
  
Ten Traits of a Groundbreaking Board

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